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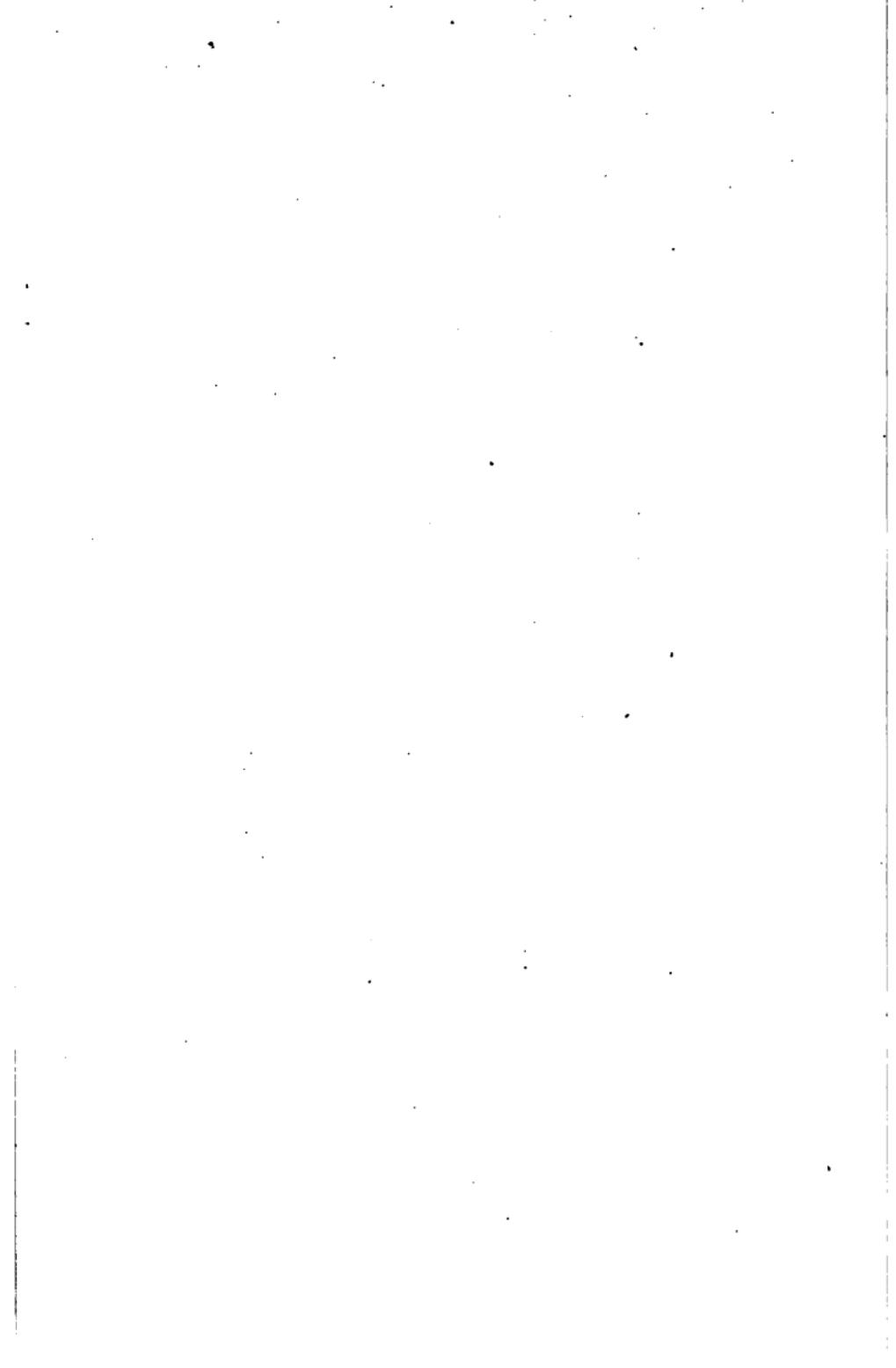
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ANNA
THE
RUNAWAY



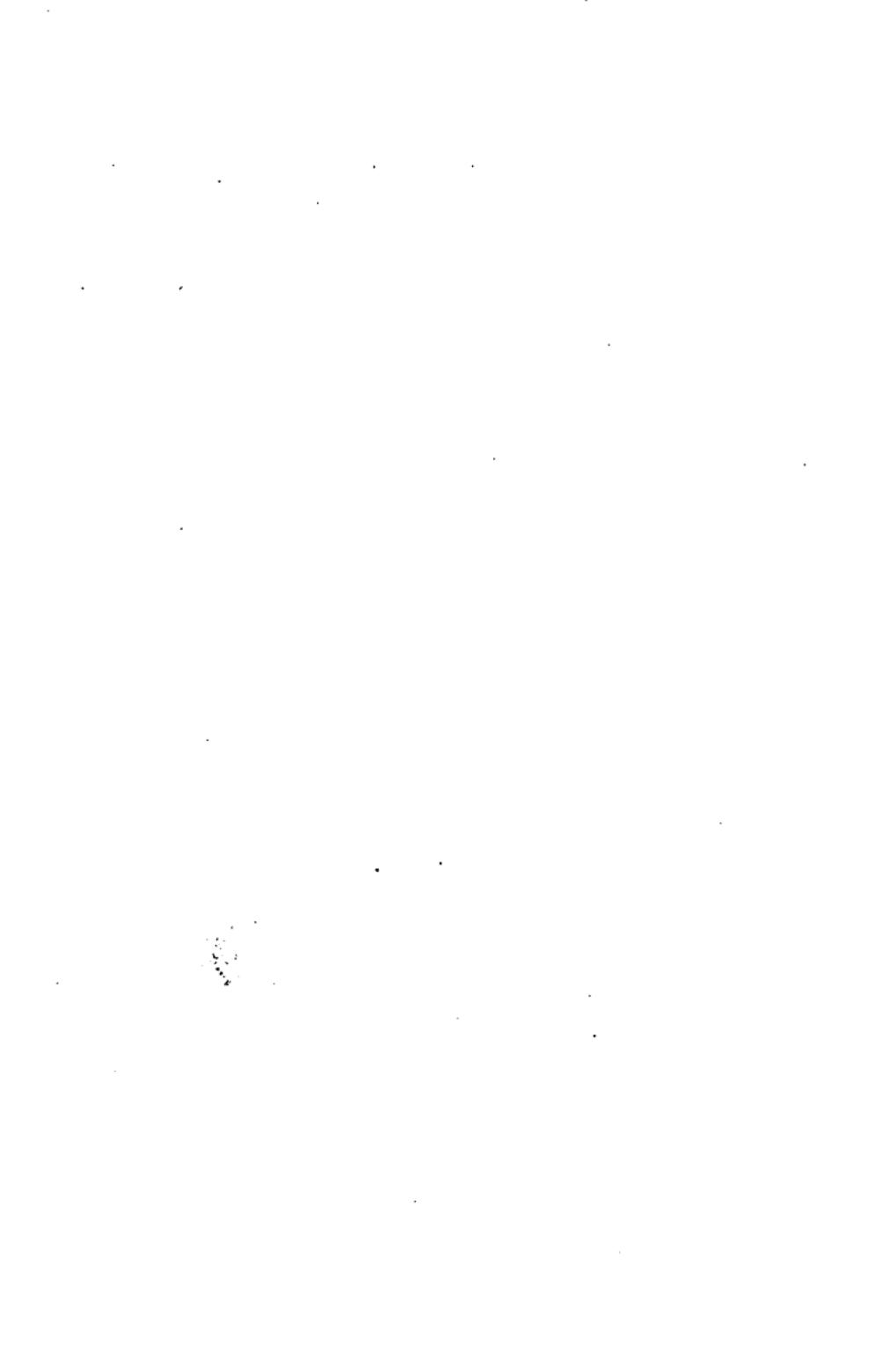


ANNA;

OR,

THE LITTLE RUNAWAY.







ANNA AND THE COUNTESS.

ANNA;

OR,

THE LITTLE RUNAWAY.

From the German.

BY

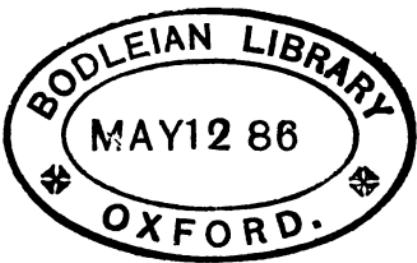
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ANNA;

OR,

THE LITTLE RUNAWAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOTHER'S DEATH.

THIS was a cold, cheerless evening, towards the close of autumn. The leaves in large numbers were being rudely torn from the trees, and, together with stray bits of straw, paper, and tiny clouds of dust, were tossed hither and thither in a whirling motion by continuous gusts of wind blowing from the east. At the corner of a street, in one of the principal towns of Germany, there glimmered forth, on the evening in question, a solitary, feeble light, which, although protected within the four glass panes of a small lantern, still burned with a flickering, unsteady flame,

the strong wind penetrating through the narrow crevices.

The pale light shone full upon the face of Gertrude Schumacher, who for many years had been scarcely called by any other name than "the good old Gerte." She was seated on a plain wooden bench behind her little store of red-cheeked apples and pears, which, in spite of the inclemency of the weather, were sufficiently tempting to invite the attention of the passers-by, many of whom stood still to purchase the beautiful ripe fruit, and exchange a few kindly words with the aged fruit-seller.

The accustomed hour at length drew near for returning home, and hastily collecting her fruit, the good woman packed it carefully into a deep basket, within the leathern bands of which she now slid her arms, leaving it suspended on her back; then taking her bench in one hand, and her lantern in the other, away she hobbled along the streets, till halting for an instant in front of a large high building, she disappeared within the wide entrance-hall.

Having deposited her heavy basket and bench in the cellar, old Gerte began slowly to ascend the steep, well-worn steps, till arriving before the door of her modest dwelling on the fourth floor, she unlocked and entered her scantily furnished, but

clean, tidy apartment, with a sigh of relief, for she felt wearied, cold, and somewhat exhausted from the violence of the wind to which she had been so long exposed.

As she lived quite alone, Gertrude found her little home in precisely the same state as when she had left it in the morning. Soon, however, a cheerful fire was burning in the stove, and the good woman, after preparing her frugal supper, sat down at the table in the old arm-chair to enjoy it and the rest she so much required. She had not been seated very long when there was a gentle tap at the door, which was at once responded to by the encouragingly repeated words, "Ah, there already, are you? come in! come in!" and the next instant two children crossed the threshold, and walked towards her hand in hand.

"We've knocked at the door ever so often already, Gerte, but you've never answered," said the elder of the two, a fine boy about seven years of age apparently; "mother has been sleeping so very long to-day——"

"And we've had nothing to eat for a long time," chimed in the little girl, still holding fast her brother's hand.

"Hush, Engelchen!"* whispered the boy eagerly. "That looks as if——"

* Little angel—a German form of endearment.

"Ah, yes, as if you were hungry, my poor dears!" interrupted the good old Gerte, as she hastily cut a slice of bread, and gave the half to each. Then adding thereto a few beautiful apples, she continued—"There now, eat your supper like good children, and let your poor, dear mother enjoy her sleep a little longer; then we'll go over together in a little, and I'll make her comfortable for the night."

Meanwhile the children, who had seated themselves at the table, requiring no second invitation, began to eat the bread and fruit placed before them in a very hearty manner, for they were really hungry. The clothing they wore was of rather coarse materials; but everything they had on was beautifully clean and neatly made. The boy, whose name was Friedel, had a round, chubby face, thick brown curly hair, and truthful dark eyes, which ever and anon were turned upon his little sister, with a look of anxiety touching to behold in so young a child. Ever since his mother's feeble state of health had forced her to remain in bed, he had taken entire charge of his little sister, for whom he felt the strongest affection, her clinging dependence upon him having drawn this forth to an unusual degree.

Anna was the little girl's name; but everybody preferred to call her by the pet name, Engelchen, given to her by her mother. She looked pale and

somewhat delicate ; her features were small but regular, and her lovely blue eyes were clear and sparkling. She had a beautifully shaped head, with a profusion of golden silky ringlets falling over her small, rounded shoulders.

Supper ended, Gertrude rose ; and after putting the various articles back into their accustomed places, she lifted the lantern from the table, saying, "Come along now, dears ; let us go to your mother, and see what we can do for her !"

Gertrude Schumacher had been a good, kind friend to the young widow, whose sadly distressing circumstances drew forth her heartfelt sympathies and active assistance. No sooner had she heard that the poor woman was unable to rise from her bed, than the good old Gerte sought to comfort her, by assuring her that she would come over every evening after supper to put the house in order and see after the children a bit ; and never once from that day had she neglected that self-imposed task.

As they now entered the dark, silent room, Gertrude waited for an instant to listen for the customary words of welcome from the sick-bed ; but as no sound reached her ear, she concluded that her friend was still asleep ; so cautioning the children to be very quiet, she led them in, and after setting them down to play at some game, she

lighted the stove, for it was a cold evening, and began to clean the room and make it comfortable.

Feeling surprised at length that the noise unavoidably made by her had not disturbed the invalid, and that not once even had she coughed, Gertrude stepped softly forward towards the bed, and holding the lantern up, shaded by her hand, looked down with eager anxiety upon the face of the sleeper, which, though pale and emaciated in the extreme, was still beautiful, and bore a striking resemblance to that of the fair little child, Engelchen.

Suppressing the exclamation of horror which rose to her lips, the kind-hearted woman laid her hard brown hand gently upon the death-cold forehead, over which a few locks of fair hair had rolled. "Ah, and so entirely alone, with no friend to cheer you, my poor dear ! Who could believe that death should have come to you so suddenly as this !" Then laying down the lantern, she kneeled down at the bedside to pray.

Startled by an involuntary cry, the children started to their feet, and clinging to each other with scared looks on their young faces, they watched the — to them — unaccountable movements of their kind old neighbour.

" You're crying, Gerte !" exclaimed Engelchen

at last, as she saw tears rolling down the old woman's cheeks.

The child's voice at once roused Gertrude to a sense of her duty, and rising hurriedly, she said, with winning kindness, "Come away back with me, dearies; you must sleep in my room to-night."

"Is mother still sleeping?" asked Friedel, casting an anxious, almost frightened, look towards the bed.

"Alas, yes!" murmured the old woman, turning round to conceal her agitation. She knew not how she was to tell these poor, helpless children of their sad and irreparable loss. Resolving in her own mind that it would be better to say nothing to them until the morrow, when she should explain all to them by degrees, she took the clothes from the little bed which stood at the side of the mother's; then saying, "Bring the lantern, Friedel, dear!" she took Engelchen's hand and led her away.

When about to step into the hall, the little girl suddenly stood still, and looking up in the old woman's face, said, "Oh, let me say good-night to mother first."

"Better not, Engelchen," said Friedel, sadly; "let our dear mother sleep, it is good for her, you know."

"Did your poor, dear mother never ask for me?" inquired Gertrude, whilst arranging some pillows on the hard sofa, so as to make up as comfortable a bed as possible for the little orphans.

"Oh, yes; she wanted you very much several times, but when I came to tell you, you were never here," replied Friedel.

"Alas, poor dear! Doubtless she wished to lay her precious little ones on my heart," thought the tender-hearted woman, as she brushed tear after tear from her eyes with her weather-beaten hand. "And what am I to do with the poor things, I who am so poverty-stricken myself? For a few days it may do well enough for me to keep them, but what then? They've no relations that I know of, and they've no right to the Orphan House, their mother being a stranger here. Oh, how hard it must have been for her to go away and leave these dear children!"

The temporary bed was now ready, and after helping the children to undress, Gertrude repeated with them their evening prayer, as frequently she had done of late when putting them to bed beside their mother; then tucking the bed-clothes comfortably around them, she kissed them with tender sympathy, and left them to sleep.

After the lapse of a short time, Gertrude stepped forward quietly to assure herself that they were

asleep. For a few moments she stood gazing earnestly upon the little sleepers, as they lay there locked in each other's arms, the fair silky ringlets mingling with the short brown curls on the same pillow; then turning away with a sigh, the good soul mentally ejaculated, "Would that I were rich enough to provide for you both, and keep you always with me!"

Very puzzling and perplexing were the thoughts which crowded in upon the mind of Gertrude Schumacher, whilst moving about softly, arranging and putting her little household affairs in order, according to her usual custom, she being obliged to leave her home at an early hour every morning. These children had become dear to her heart; many a time had they broken in upon the solitude of her evening hours, and had made her happy by their innocent mirth and prattle; and now, as she thought of them in their forlorn and helpless condition, her whole nature thrilled with compassionate tenderness towards them; and although unable to come to any clear understanding as to how she should act in the matter, there was present the strong inward conviction that, come what might, she would never see them want so long as she had health and strength to work for their daily bread.

A sharp, and at once recognised knock at the

door interrupted the good woman's meditations ; and "Come in ! come in !" she cried, in tones of gladsome welcome ; then hastening forward to meet her visitor—a middle-aged woman in the dress of a peasant—she saluted her, saying, "Ah ! I was just hoping you would come here to-night ; I'm so glad to see you, dear ; there, let me take that basket from your back !"

"Well, I can't say I'm sorry to part with the load ; those long stairs of yours try one, and I do feel in need of a rest. The fruit I've brought you this time is beautiful and is sure to sell well. Just look at those apples, will you, till I recover my breath a bit ;" and turning round as she uttered these words, Gertrude's sister-in-law, for it was she who had just come in, walked towards the sofa. Suddenly starting back, however, she exclaimed, with unfeigned surprise, "Why, Gerte, what's this ? Whom have you got here ?"

"Oh, two dear little lambs ! You've just come in time to help me with your advice, for truly I feel at my wit's end !" replied Gertrude, in a plaintive voice, and then, in as few words as possible, she related the sad particulars of the mother's sudden death, and of the deplorably destitute condition of the poor children.

"And so you've taken them to your heart and home, have you ? You who, by dint of hard

labour, can barely manage to pay your way and keep yourself comfortable! But it's like you, Gerte!"

" You needn't speak so reproachfully, sister, for aren't there even now tears in your own eyes?" responded Gertrude, exultingly.

" Well, well : I didn't mean to be harsh, Gerte dear! Now that I've seen them, and heard their history, I can't wonder that you should feel a deep interest in the poor things. The little girl is a lovely child—what a pure skin she has! And those golden ringlets look like silk—so soft and beautiful they are!"

" Oh, what pride and pleasure the young mother used to take in that infant's hair!" said Gertrude, with a sigh. " The ringlets you now see were formed by her fingers this morning, poor dear!"

A short silence here intervened, broken by the sister-in-law, who, as if carrying on a conversation with herself, remarked in an absent manner, " The little girl would certainly not do for us—no, she's too delicate looking, and would be far too heavy a charge for me; no, I mustn't think of it! But the boy seems a fine sturdy fellow, and might become useful to us by and by, and—yes, he might help to fill up the vacant place left by our own dear Friedel—strange that he should have the same name!" Then, with a look of timid anxiety, she

turned towards Gertrude with the inquiry, " How would it do for me to take the boy, do you think ? I should like to have him very well, but then——"

" Oh, do take him then by all means !" quickly interrupted Gertrude, with unwonted energy.

" But what of my husband, Gerte ? The question which puzzles me is, will he think it right or prudent of me to bring another child into our home to feed, clothe, and educate ?"

" Ah, as for my good brother Johann, I think I can vouch for him : he's ever been a true and warm friend to little children in distress ; and then, you know, a fine boy like Friedel will easily repay tenfold, when he is old enough, all that he may cost you for a little time now. I can't but think too, Marianne, that God is answering the oft-repeated prayer of the poor young widow, by putting the good kind wish into your heart now to be a mother to her darling son."

" Well, then, in God's name, I'll venture it !" was the immediate rejoinder.

" And may God himself reward and bless you !" faltered Gertrude, in a voice well-nigh choked with emotion.

After some further conversation on a variety of subjects, Frau Marianne Herder took her departure, she having arranged to pass the night in a small inn in the immediate neighbourhood.

Scarcely had Gertrude sat down to collect her thoughts and quiet her mind before undressing, when she was startled by a few half-stifled sobs, and going at once to the sofa she found that Friedel was weeping bitterly.

"Why, Friedel, whatever's the matter with you? I thought you were sound asleep," said Gertrude, as she gently uncovered the boy's face.

A loud burst of crying was the only response, the poor boy having evidently struggled long to restrain his feelings. "Oh, Gerte, dear," he said at last, "don't be angry with me—I've heard everything—my own darling mother's dead, and I'll have to go away from you and Engelchen to live with strangers—oh dear! oh dear!"

"Friedel, my poor dear, don't cry like that! you'll awake your little sister. It is now well with your dear mother—she's free from all her troubles, and is happy with the Lord whom she loved and served. Now, then, go to sleep like a dear, good child." But Friedel could not sleep. Sorrow drove him from his warm, comfortable bed, and running across the room after the good old woman who had been so kind to him, he threw his arms around her neck, and buried his tear-stained face on her bosom.

Taking him on her knee, Gertrude wrapped a warm shawl round the trembling boy, and began,

in her simple motherly way, to soothe and comfort him as best she could. She spoke to him in glowing terms about the glorious home of the blessed, where his parents were now together, adoring God and singing sweet hymns of praise. And then she told him all about the happy home of her own dear brother, to which he was to go, and urged him to show his gratitude by looking as cheerful as possible on the morrow, when her sister-in-law came for him.

When descanting upon the beauties and attractions of the small farm in the country, Friedel suddenly interrupted her by asking, with eager impatience, "But what's to become of Engelchen?"

"I'll take care of her for the present, dearie!" replied the good woman after a few moments' hesitation; "and you can often come to see her, you know. Marianne is very kind, and she's sure to bring you with her every time she comes to town with the fruit. And now, Friedel, let me counsel you to be a good, brave-hearted lad; never forget the lessons taught you by your mother; thank God for the comfortable home He has provided for you; and show your gratitude by being diligent and anxious to do your duty in every respect. If adopted, as I hope you will be, by my brother and his wife, see that you act the part

of a loving, faithful son towards them all the days of your life. Everybody will be kind to you in your new home, and you'll soon be quite happy, so do not grieve and vex our hearts by looking dismal; but strive for all our sakes to go away with a cheerful, contented spirit. You'll do this, won't you, dearie?"

"Yes, I'll try; but, oh, if I could only have my little sister! Mother taught me to look after her, and I'm quite sure she wanted me always to be with her!" cried Friedel, piteously, giving way to a fresh burst of convulsive sobbing, which greatly distressed the tender-hearted Gertrude.

Overcome at last by exhaustion, the poor little fellow fell fast asleep, with his arm still encircling the neck of the good old Gerte, who, rising gently, laid him down once more upon the sofa beside his little sister; and after regarding the two unconscious orphans with loving sympathy in her heart, she turned away to prepare for bed, saying, "Well, it does seem very cruel to part them, and yet what else can be done?"





CHAPTER II.

THE SEPARATION.

THE next morning, when Frau Marianne Herder arrived, she found old Gerte and the two children seated round the table, enjoying with evident relish their frugal breakfast, which consisted of warm milk soup and rye bread.

"You haven't changed your mind about the lad, I hope?" said old Gerte, with unwonted eagerness, as she led her sister-in-law into the recess at the window.

"No, indeed, that I haven't, Gerte; and now I'm quite prepared to take him home with me this morning; but does he know of my plan?"

"Oh yes; he knows all about it. The poor child was awake and heard the whole of our conversation last night, and a terrible business I had, I can tell you, before he could be soothed to sleep; but he's a dear sensible lad, and will, I'm sure, go quite cheerfully with you." Then turning round,

Gertrude called to Friedel with much kindness of tone and manner, "Come along here, my boy, and give your new mother a kiss!"

At the word "mother," a deep flush overspread his countenance, betraying the confusion he felt; but looking up the next minute, Friedel, with the quick inexplicable instinct of a child's soul, immediately felt the influence of the sympathetic love he discovered in those sunbrowned features, and with apparent confidence placed both hands in those of the kind woman, who finally embraced him tenderly, saying, "May God our heavenly Father make us blessings to each other, my dear son!"

"Amen!" was the solemnly uttered response of old Gerte.

A few minutes later, whilst drawing her fingers through his thick curly hair, Frau Herder said to Friedel in a cheerful voice, "And now we must see about buying a new doublet, a silk necktie, and pretty red stockings, for I wish my boy to look nice when I take him home. Surely my husband will welcome him with joy! Don't you think so, Gertrude?"

"Yes, yes; I'm certain you'll not be disappointed, dear!" replied Gertrude heartily.

The look of delight which had been called forth at the bare mention of fine new clothes was sud-

denly replaced by one of distress, as Friedel's eyes rested upon the face of his little sister, who was playing quietly with her spoon. No sooner had Frau Herder observed this rapid change of expression than with much feeling she said in a whisper, " You'll often come to see her, dear, for I intend to bring you always with me ; and then, after you know the road well enough, you'll be sent here every now and again on some errand or other, I daresay. So cheer up, my son, and don't look so dismal ! But now I must go and attend to my customers. You may expect me back again in an hour, when I hope to find you ready to start with me at once."

On leaving the room with her sister-in-law, Gertrude took a key from a nail in the wall, and crossing the hall said, " Come, let us go in here together for a minute !" With quiet reverential mien, the two women entered the apartment and approached the bed. As Gertrude gently raised the white coverlet with a trembling hand, she said solemnly and with great earnestness, " Now, Marianne, dear, will you promise me here that you'll strive to be a faithful loving mother to the son of this poor woman, and that you will train him and bring him up in the fear of the Lord ? "

" God helping me, I hereby promise, Gerte, to act towards Friedel as if he were my own

child," replied Frau Herder earnestly and with deep emotion.

"Now, then, the Lord be praised! My promise to the dear departed soul is so far fulfilled—her boy is provided for, and God will no doubt care for our poor Engelchen also!"

When Gertrude re-entered her little dwelling, she found Friedel seated upon a footstool, with Engelchen on his knee. He was in the act of rolling the fair hair round his fingers, so as to form pretty ringlets, in the same manner that he had seen his mother do day after day.

"Ah, how cruel it seems to part them!" soliloquised the good woman. "But what else can be done; Marianne couldn't take both children—that's clear. I must just keep the little one myself, and trust to a kind Providence to provide me with the means; and who knows but she may yet repay me for all my labour and anxiety, by being my comfort and helper in my old age!"

Having collected the few articles of clothing, etc., which belonged to Friedel, Gertrude tied them up neatly in a bundle, and then taking the boy aside, she told him how much she loved him, and how vexed she was that he and Engelchen had to be parted for a time. Much good advice did the kind old woman whisper in his ear as she caressed and fondled him, endeavouring by every means in

her power to reconcile him to the idea of leaving her and the little sister he clung to with so much tenderness.

Exactly at the hour appointed Frau Herder arrived, and, after a little conversation, intimated to her sister-in-law that she had no more time to spare. Whereupon Gertrude, with her usual thoughtfulness, filled a small basket with beautiful rosy-cheeked apples, and placing it on the table before Engelchen, bade her roll them about and play with them. The child was soon so absorbed in her new amusement that she took no notice of the painful separation which took place between Friedel and the truly kind neighbour who had been such a good friend to their dear mother ; and so accustomed was she to her brother's affectionate embraces that she even failed to observe anything peculiar in this, to him, terrible farewell greeting. Only a short time had elapsed, however, when Engelchen called out, "Friedel ! Friedel !" "He's gone away with Marianne, dearie ; but he'll come back again," said Gertrude soothingly, and for the time being she was quieted ; but soon afterwards, more eagerly than ever, did she cry, first for Friedel, and then running to the door, for her mother.

Taking the poor child on her knee, Gertrude began to speak kindly and gently to her ; and

when she had succeeded in dispelling her fears, she explained to her that Friedel had gone with Marianne to a beautiful place not very far off, and that she would take her to him on Sunday, when she would see such a lot of lovely flowers; cows, sheep, and goats on the green meadow—and pretty pigeons, ducks, hens, and other animals all over the farm. "And now, darling, you must come with me to-day! Won't that be nice!"

"To the pretty place and Friedel?" inquired Engelchen eagerly.

"No, dearie, we can't go there to-day. You must come and help me to sell my fruit, you know, for you can't stay here all alone."

The idea of going with the good old Gerte pleased the child wonderfully, and whilst toddling along, with a firm grasp of her kind friend's hand, she prattled away in quite a lively manner. Never before had Engelchen witnessed such a busy scene, and the novelty greatly delighted her as she sat watching the passers-by and the serving of customers with fruit. The novelty soon wore off, however, and Gertrude allowed her to run about and amuse herself near the stall.

"Show me where Friedel's gone to!" exclaimed Engelchen, as she pulled Gertrude's dress to attract her attention on returning to the stall after a short absence. "Which way is he coming back to me?"

"He's away yonder!" replied Gertrude, pointing with her finger. Then, in the hope of diverting the child's thoughts from her brother, she placed a small coin in her hand, saying, "There, dearie, run across to that baker's shop and buy a nice cake for yourself."

Meanwhile several customers came and went; and now, beginning to feel uneasy regarding the safety of her little charge, who had not yet returned, Gertrude rose from her seat and looked anxiously round in all directions, but the child was nowhere to be seen. "Ah, this'll never do!" she mentally ejaculated. "I must fall upon some other plan than bringing her here with me—I can't be always watching the little thing, and some accident might easily befall her!"

Let us now return to Engelchen, and follow her as she crossed the narrow street and entered the baker's shop. Having received a nice fresh bun in exchange for the copper coin, she quickly left the shop, and, running to the corner of the street, looked eagerly up to see if Friedel was not yet in sight. After standing still for a few moments, the poor child, in the hope of meeting her dear brother, began to wander along—very slowly at first—eating her bun, and turning round occasionally to see if old Gerte was not coming.

She had not gone very far when, catching sight

of some trees apparently at no great distance, Engelchen suddenly quickened her pace; and now all thoughts of her old protector and dread at being alone, were swallowed up in the one absorbing idea that the pretty place to which Friedel had gone must be near at hand; and that very soon he would come to meet her, and show her all the beautiful flowers and pretty birds about which the good old Gerte had told her.

No fear of danger entered the little one's mind as she hurried along, nor did she for an instant stop to consider that she was doing wrong—no thought of her mother even mingled with her thoughts. Friedel had long been her constant companion and protector, and never since the beginning of their mother's fatal illness had they been so long separated. “He must be coming to me now! He must be coming!” So on she ran to lessen the distance between them, her little heart beating high with hope and joy at the anticipated sight of her darling brother.

Street after street had thus been traversed by those little feet, when suddenly the scene was changed, and Engelchen found herself on a broad country road, where no more houses were to be seen, only trees and grassy fields. As the sun poured down his rays on fields, gardens, and distant hills, she stood still with astonishment

and clapped her little hands with delight, for never before had she seen anything so lovely, never having been beyond the boundaries of that town in her life.

All was so peaceful and beautiful—no more bustling to and fro of busy people. “Oh yes, the pretty farm must be very near!” thought Engelchen; and, though footsore and tired, onwards she sped, inspired with the fresh hope of being with Friedel very soon.

The peasants who met her might have been momentarily surprised indeed to see so young a child on the road alone; but seeing that she toddled along with such an apparent knowledge of her way, they passed on, each occupied with thoughts of his or her concerns.

Turning into a little path, bordered on either side by trees, Engelchen looked up at the tempting berries which hung above her head, and, standing on tiptoe, tried, but in vain, to reach them with her tiny arms. Oh, how she longed then for Friedel to help her, or pluck for her the rich red clusters which grew there in such abundance! And once more, with quickened speed, she hurried along, till, coming to the outskirts of a dense forest, she wandered on by the side of it more and more slowly; and now, when well-nigh exhausted, our poor little wanderer lay down upon a soft

mossy patch of green to rest awhile, she soon succumbed to the soothing influences of the sweet-scented breezes which played around her, and closing her eyes, fell into a most delightful slumber.





CHAPTER III.

FRIEDEL'S FIRST VISIT.

MAFTER a long but ineffectual search, in which some of her neighbours kindly lent their assistance, Gertrude Schumacher hastened with all possible speed towards the police office, in the hope that she might find her lost darling there; but, alas! no such happiness awaited her; and, after giving a minute description of the child and of the circumstances connected with her disappearance, she slowly wended her steps homewards with a truly heavy heart.

This was a sad dreary night for poor old Gerte, who in an agony of mind reproached herself over and over again for what she termed her "cruel neglect and carelessness;" and long and earnestly did she, on bended knees, implore God to forgive her, and, in loving mercy, to watch over the little helpless child, and guard her from all harm.

• Despite her distress of mind, however, Gertrude

did not forget to make a beautiful wreath of flowers, which with her own hands she placed reverently upon the unconscious remains of the young widow. She was the only friend who followed the bier to the grave; and for many a night afterwards was she haunted in her dreams with the idea, that the eyes of the poor mother were fixed upon her with a sorrowful reproachful gaze.

As day after day passed by without bringing any tidings of the little wanderer, hope began to languish; and it was with fear and trembling that Gertrude anticipated Friedel's first visit to his old home.

One Sunday morning, as Gertrude was in the act of preparing her simple mid-day meal, the noise of quick eager steps suddenly caught her ear.

“Alas, alas! there he is; oh, whatever shall I do!” Then after an ejaculatory cry for help from on high, she opened the door and clasped the happy, excited Friedel in her arms.

Disengaging himself with impatient haste, the boy glanced rapidly round the room, and then turning from Gertrude's face of terrible distress to that of Frau Marianne Herder, who had just come in, he almost screamed out the words, “Where, oh! where's Engelchen?”

“Why, Gertrude, whatever is the matter with

you?" exclaimed Frau Herder, hurrying forward to the chair on which the poor old woman had sunk, "are you ill?"

Before there was time for an answer, Friedel had seized her arm, and with now pale and trembling lips, cried with passionate earnestness, "Oh Gerte, Gerte, what have you done with my poor little sister?"

Alarmed at the terrible agitation of her adopted son, and feeling at the same time somewhat irritated by her sister-in-law's unaccountable silence, Frau Herder said, in rather a severe tone, "You *must* speak, Gertrude! anything is better than this awful suspense. Is the poor child ill?"

"Oh, would that I had no worse news to tell!" faltered Gertrude at last, with a look of despair. "Our little darling's lost!"

"Lost!" exclaimed Frau Herder in amazement; "what can you mean?"

"Woe's me, woe's me! for in an evil hour she ran away and left me;" was the wailing answer.

At these words Friedel rushed madly to the door. "And whither wouldst thou go, my son?" exclaimed Frau Herder, as she flew after him and held him back by gentle force.

"To find Engelchen, of course. Oh, mother dear, let me go at once!"

"We shall go together, my boy; but you must

have patience till we hear the particulars. How else can we ever hope to find her?" and after a few soothing words, Friedel listened quietly whilst Gertrude related the sad tale of his little sister's loss; and then his sore grief found vent in a flood of passionate weeping. The news of Engelchen's loss was terrible to bear; but oh, to sit still and do nothing under such circumstances, was if possible still harder to endure. The first burst of grief over, Friedel started to his feet, saying, "But, mother, surely something may yet be done; let me go and search the streets till I find her!"

Frau Herder, whose warmest sympathies had been drawn out towards her sorrow-stricken boy, clasped him in her arms as she replied: "No, Friedel, no; that could do no good. If in the town, the police will find her, of that you may rest assured. Gertrude has already done all that is possible, and now we can only hope and pray that God may bless her efforts with success. Oh, had I only dreamed of such a sad catastrophe as this, how much rather should I have taken your little sister too!"

The only response to this was a fresh burst of weeping, which neither she nor Gertrude sought to control, deeming it kinder and wiser to leave the poor boy alone for a time with his bitter sorrow.

In the afternoon a visit was paid to the recently made grave, upon which Friedel placed a wreath of evergreens he had brought with him for that purpose; and then, after bidding Gertrude good-bye, Frau Herder and he began to retrace their steps back to the little farm.

In the pale sad face and dejected mien of the forlorn-looking boy, it would have been difficult to realise that this was the same Friedel, who, with a light bounding step and bright joyous countenance, had been seen hurrying along not many hours before, ever a few steps in advance, in his eager haste to have his beloved Engelchen again in his arms. Truly this was a melancholy ending to his eagerly anticipated visit to the town.

After walking on, hand in hand, for some little distance in perfect silence, Frau Herder sought in kindly sympathising tones to administer comfort; and fan into brightness once more the well-nigh extinguished spark of hope; and to the joy of her heart success ere long crowned her efforts.

And now for a time the daily routine of duties went on very much as they had done before this sad event took place. Gertrude was as regular as ever in her attendance at her stall; but, oh, what a sad change in the appearance of the old fruit-seller was observable to everybody! All her ac-

customed cheerfulness gone, there she sat day after day silent and dejected, except when roused by her customers from time to time.

By his diligence and uniform good conduct, both at home and when in school, Friedel had soon won the confidence and love of his foster parents, who spoke of him as the bright sunbeam God had sent to cheer and make glad their childless home. Most truly did they sympathise with him in his heavy sorrow, whilst at the same time endeavouring to keep alive the feeble hope that his dear little sister, Engelchen, would yet be found. Whenever there was business to transact, Friedel invariably accompanied Frau Herder to the town, and on such occasions a visit was always paid to the good old Gerte, the melancholy expression on whose countenance was ever a sufficient answer to the eager inquiry, without the oft repeated words, "No trace yet of our poor little darling?" and each time Friedel returned home with a heavier load than before upon his young heart.

When crossing one of the principal streets one day, on their return from the town, a handsome carriage drove past them, on which was emblazoned a coat of arms. The coachman, as well as the footman who stood behind, wore dark blue livery faced with gold. Whilst waiting till it passed, Friedel looked with some curiosity through

the open window. Near it stood a beautiful child in a blue silk dress, trimmed with swans'-down, and a white hat with feathers, from underneath which fell a mass of long silky ringlets. For an instant Friedel stood staring as if bewitched, then uttering a peculiar cry, he rushed after the carriage, which seemed to fly along with lightning speed.

Unable to comprehend this strange behaviour on the part of her son, Frau Herder, after calling to him to come back to her in vain, made after him as fast as she could. Soon he was out of her sight; but still on she ran, saying to herself, "Whatever can have come over the child? Never has he disobeyed my call before; God grant he mayn't have lost his senses with all this fretting about his sister!"

By good chance the street she now entered was the one down which Friedel had rushed; for not far from her Frau Herder caught sight of him standing at a corner. A pang of dread shot through her heart as she approached; for there he stood like a statue, pale and immovable, his face covered with large drops of perspiration, and his eyes filled with tears. Taking hold of his arm, she asked in alarm, "Whatever's the meaning of this, Friedel?"

"Oh mother, I've seen Engelchen!" he exclaimed

in the greatest excitement. "She was standing at the window of that splendid carriage, and oh, how grandly dressed she was!"

"Come, come, dear boy; you've been dreaming! What a fright and race you have given me, to be sure!" replied Frau Herder, with some degree of asperity.

"Oh, I'm very sorry, but it's quite true, mother! I knew her in a moment, even dressed like that, and I ran as fast as I could; but the carriage flew at such a rate, I lost sight of it, and can't tell which way to turn."

"Would that it were possible," responded Frau Herder, whose momentary irritation had entirely disappeared. "But you must have been mistaken, my dear boy. How could the dear child come to be in such a grand carriage as that? The fact is, Engelchen is always in your thoughts, and the little girl you saw may bear some resemblance to her, and so—"

"But, mother, I'm perfectly sure it was Engelchen herself," insisted Friedel with unwonted energy. "And there was a grandly-dressed lady sitting beside her in the carriage. Oh, if I could only have run fast enough!"

Coming to the conclusion that nothing would drive the idea from his mind, and with a view to calming the excited boy, Frau Herder said, whilst

pressing her hand firmly on his shoulder, “Friedel, you know that I love you, and that I am most anxious that you should have your little sister restored to you; trust to me to help you in every possible way; but now, for my sake, be courageous, and don’t give way to this excitement. Just look what a crowd has gathered round us! We shall go back to the good old Gerte, and you can tell her the whole story of your strange adventure, and doubtless we may fall upon some plan whereby we may discover the owner of the carriage you describe.”

As it turned out, Gertrude was much more ready to believe in the possibility of Friedel’s assertions being correct than was the case with her sister-in-law; and greatly to the boy’s delight, she at once volunteered to go herself and make known the particulars to the police authorities.

“Mayn’t I go with you?” pleaded Friedel.

“No, dearie; you must take your mother home, you know: coming back here has made her too late already—your father’ll be getting anxious about you soon—see, it’s nearly twilight;” and, with a touch of her old cheery brightness, she clasped her arms round him, adding, “There, be off now at once, and let me attend to my business. Don’t you fret about Engelchen too much—we’ll yet find, I daresay, that she’s been in good keeping.”

Never had Friedel left the town with more reluctance than he did this afternoon. It seemed so hard to go away when he felt so strongly convinced that he was leaving Engelchen behind him in the town; but acting upon the good old Gerte's whispered injunction, "Be cheerful for your mother's sake, who does so much for you," he succeeded in mastering his feelings; and long before their arrival at the little farm, the buoyancy of youth had asserted its power, and glowing pictures of Engelchen's happiness floated before the boy's eyes; for never for an instant did he doubt that the beautiful little girl he had seen was any other than his darling little sister, whose loss he had so long deplored.





CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNTESS'S ADVENTURE.

THE bright light of day had begun to wane, when Engelchen was startled from her sleep by the sharp, loud barking of a dog, and springing up she looked in terror at the fierce-looking animal now close at her side. From the unusual amount of exercise she had had, the poor child's limbs ached with pain, and with a wailing cry of distress she fell back again on the mossy bank.

The beautiful staghound which had caused so much alarm was the property of the Countess von Detmar, who at this opportune moment rode forward at a canter, and in a voice of command called out, "Down, Tourbillon! down!" Then turning to her servant, she ordered him to dismount, and bring the poor child to her.

"What a lovely child!" exclaimed the Countess, as Engelchen fixed her large wondering eyes upon her. "Truly the face of a little cherub!

Hand her up here, Walter." Then placing her comfortably in front of her—"There now, little one, you need not cry any more—you are quite safe with me; but you must tell me how you came here all alone. What is your name, and where do you live?"

"Oh, Friedel, Friedel! I want Friedel!" was the mournful response.

"Well, then, you must tell me where he lives, and I shall help you to find him. Do not be afraid, dear child; I wish to take you home. (A village child, doubtless; and yet so very unlike one, with these delicately cut features and that pearly white complexion)," soliloquised the Countess; and then addressing the child again, said: "Did you come from one of the villages hereabout, and can you tell me the name of it?"

With a dreamy, puzzled look, Engelchen said, by way of reply, "Friedel lives in a pretty place, with lots of flowers and dear little animals all running about."

"But who is Friedel? Is he your brother?"

"Yes, and he must be coming to me!" replied Engelchen with sudden energy, and an evident desire to be off again to meet him.

"You must try to be a good, patient little girl, and tell me all you can remember about yourself and your friends," said the Countess, soothingly,

whilst stroking her fair ringlets. "What is your name?"

"They call me Engelchen."

"Ah, that is a very pretty name; but surely you have another name than that. Can't you recollect it?"

"Oh yes; it is Aennchen."

Before the examination was over, Engelchen's tears had ceased to flow, and ever and anon she looked up into the beautiful face of the lady who spoke so kindly to her, and then, with unfeigned surprise, at the fine dress and glittering ornaments she wore.

"What an extraordinary adventure this is!" exclaimed the Countess, at length; "I can make nothing of the child's story; but one thing is certain, whether you be a little angel or a poor village child, I can't leave you here on the road to perish." Then turning towards her servant, who was standing near, hat in hand, and holding the bridle of his horse, "Here, Walter, take good care of the little one. To-morrow you can make inquiries in all the surrounding villages, but meanwhile she can go home with me and remain, until claimed by her friends."

Bowing low, Walter took Engelchen in his arms, and having placed her on the horse, sprang nimbly up behind her; and the next minute both were being

borne swiftly along, at a respectful distance from the Countess, whose magnificent horse, and long, waving, riding habit, greatly surprised and delighted the child, who had never seen the like before. Ere many minutes had passed, all sense of fear was banished from her mind, and aches and pains, together with her feverish anxiety to be with Friedel, were all chased away by the novelty of her present circumstances; and yielding to the exhilarating influences of this charming ride, Engelchen clapped her hands in the exuberance of her joy, and chatted in great glee to her kind protector.

Arrived at the château, Engelchen was handed over at once to the care of the housekeeper, who received her little charge in respectful silence, but with the utmost astonishment; and no sooner were they alone together than she plied her with all manner of questions. The answers she drew forth, however, were so confused and unsatisfactory that she could make nothing of them except this,—that the poor child was in search of her brother, and that she was tired and hungry.

With considerate kindness the housekeeper placed before Engelchen a good supply of food, and left her for a time to enjoy it in peace; after which she washed her hands and face, arranged with care her long silky ringlets, and made her look as nice

and tidy as possible in her plain coarse garments ; then holding her out at arms' length, when the finishing touches had been given, she looked at her with admiring wonder, saying, " Now then, that's all I can do for you, my bonny dear, for fine dresses I have none to put on you. Ah ! there's the bell ; come with me to the drawing-room," taking the tiny hand in hers, " and don't forget, mind, to make a low curtsy at the door."

The exclamations of surprise and admiration, together with the great blaze of light and fairy-like splendour of the whole scene, so completely bewildered and dazzled the poor little child, on her entrance, that she could only cling the more closely to the hand of the housekeeper, and hide her face in the folds of her gown.

" Ah ! here comes my little foundling ; and you must all tell me what you think of her," said the Countess von Detmar to the gaily-attired friends who were assembled round her, in the drawing-room. " Bring her here to me, Oppermann." And putting down a pretty white curly-haired dog from her knee, the countess held out her arms to receive her. After a few words of encouragement, Engelchen looked up timidly in the face of the Countess, and recognising in her the lady who had been so kind to her, she soon felt quite at her ease, and looked happy and delighted with all she saw.

The amount of praise and admiration elicited from her guests greatly charmed the Countess; and more than ever did she feel inclined to keep the lovely little foundling, should her relatives not claim her. Meanwhile, Engelchen's eyelids were becoming heavy, and in the midst of a lively conversation, her head fell gently on the shoulders of the Countess, who, looking down at her, exclaimed in amazement, "Why, who could believe it?—the child has actually fallen asleep whilst we have been talking about her!" and immediately summoning the housekeeper, she desired her to undress and put her to bed.

It was a handsome and delightfully soft bed upon which the housekeeper now laid her little charge; but, too wearied and sleepy to take notice of anything, Engelchen merely closed her eyes, and murmured in a dreamy voice, "Good night, Friedel!" then once again her little hand was stretched out, and the fingers moved restlessly on the pillow, as if in search of the hand that had so long been in the habit of clasping them; but no Friedel was there to-night; and soon the tiny fingers were at rest.

On awaking next morning, fresh and well, after a good night's sleep, Engelchen's first cry was "Friedel!" and her first thought, "What a long dream I've had; I must tell it all to

"Friedel." But instead of her kind brother, it was a woman who was now bending over her, and who, in answer to her repeated cry, "Friedel, come here!" said in kindly tones, "It's time to get up, my bonny dear, and then we can see about finding Friedel."

In an instant the bright, joyous look had vanished; and as if in a kind of stupor, the poor child stared at the woman, whose face she quickly recognised, however, and then the whole of her yesterday's strange experience came up before her by slow degrees. Meanwhile the housekeeper, for she it was, made every possible exertion to please and amuse her little charge; nor was it long before she succeeded in doing so; and when, shortly afterwards, Engelchen was summoned to the breakfast-room, the Countess was perfectly charmed with the happy expression on the countenance of her little foundling.

For the last few months the Countess von Detmar had been living quite alone, in her beautifully situated summer residence. She was a pretty young widow, whose only child had died in infancy. She was rich, and surrounded with all the luxuries of life; for not a pleasure which money could procure did she think of denying herself. Of a naturally gay, lively disposition, she was ever fond of change and excitement.

Whimsical and capricious to a degree, she was nevertheless much admired and sought after by a large number of friends.

The finding of this lovely child formed a pleasing episode in the somewhat monotonous life of the Countess; and it was with unfeigned delight she received the announcement that no child had been missed from any of the surrounding villages.

"Ah, now I may keep my little foundling without further scruple or hesitation! And glad indeed I am to be able to do so, for she is a dear little cherub, and will make my home quite lively and cheerful." Flowers, parrot, and lap-dog, together with all her numerous pets, suddenly lost their power to arrest her attention, and the child, Engelchen, reigned supreme in her thoughts.

Never once, for years gone by, had the rich young widow felt such an absorbing interest in any living object. There was something so fresh, so unsophisticated and engaging, about the child. And then she had such funny little ways; so entirely different, in fact, was she from any child she had ever seen.

What a change, meanwhile, was this for the poor little orphan! Transported from a hovel, as it were, to a palace—it seemed all like a wonderful dream. The beautiful lady who petted and

caressed her, giving her fine clothes and pretty red shoes ; and then the large garden with the lovely bright flowers, and such a grand array of splendid toys !

The instructions of the Countess were carried out to the letter, the servants all seeming to vie with each other in ministering to the comfort and happiness of her little pet, and in their efforts to wean her from old associations. No wonder surely that under such circumstances, Engelchen's ideas became confused, and that she felt as if in a new world altogether. The questions she asked regarding her mother, Friedel, and the good old Gerte, became fewer and fewer as days and weeks flew past, until they ceased altogether. But one old habit remained strong as ever—no sooner did balmy sleep partially chill her senses, than out went the tiny fingers to make their nightly search for the hand of her darling brother.

Meanwhile, a marked change had taken place in the outward appearance of the little orphan. Instead of the plain coarse garments she wore when first she entered the château, she was now dressed with the greatest taste and elegance, no expense being spared that could add to the charm of her appearance. The rich bloom of health which glowed upon her cheeks made her look more lovely

than ever—and feeling truly proud of her little foundling, the Countess took her with her in the carriage wherever she went.

It was quite apparent, however, that Engelchen was regarded merely in the light of a plaything, to minister to the amusement and enjoyment of her generous benefactor. That the child, in whose eyes sparkled the light of intelligence, and whose clever ingenuous remarks threw her into an ecstasy of delight, had a soul as well as a body to be trained, nurtured, and beautified, never for a moment seemed to enter the mind of the kind and indulgent, but thoughtless and selfish Countess von Detmar.

The child's innocent prattle and merry laughter daily afforded her fresh pleasure and amusement, whilst nothing gratified her more than listening to the extravagant terms of admiration, in which some of her friends indulged, when speaking to her of the beauty and graceful movements of her little foundling. In this way life passed on so agreeably and happily that when the usual time for returning to town came round, the Countess showed none of her wonted anxiety to be there, in time for the beginning of the winter festivities; and great was the surprise of all, when she announced her intention to remain in the country so long as the weather should continue fine.



CHAPTER V.

THE CRUEL SURPRISE.

DNE day shortly after this, Engelchen became suddenly and alarmingly ill, and a doctor was summoned in haste from a neighbouring village.

In answer to the eager inquiry, "What is the matter with my little pet?" Dr Werner replied, with a grave shake of the head, "The poor child is seriously ill, I fear; but it is impossible for me to give a decided opinion as to the nature of the malady, until after I have seen her to-morrow morning." And having given some necessary instructions to the housekeeper, regarding the treatment of his little patient, he bade the Countess von Detmar "Good night."

Poor Engelchen passed a very troubled, restless night; and when Dr Werner arrived the following morning he saw at a glance that his suspicions of the previous night had been correct; and seeking an interview with the Countess, he informed her

that he now no longer had any difficulty in pronouncing this a decided case of smallpox, and warned her, if she had any regard for her own safety, to remove at once to her town residence.

The terrible news was received by the Countess with the greatest consternation and distress. Captivated by the extreme beauty and artlessness of the child, she had resolved to keep her, if possible, for her own pleasure; but never had it dawned upon her mind that vexation and trouble, so overwhelming as this, could be the result.

In accordance with the advice of Dr Werner, preparations were made for her departure without delay; and she drove away from the château, accompanied by some of her servants, without even one farewell look at the poor little sufferer, who was lying dangerously ill in a room the most remote from those occupied by her. Before leaving, however, she had given instructions to the housekeeper that every possible attention should be paid to the little invalid during her absence. An experienced nurse, recommended by the doctor, had been engaged, who, with the exception of himself, was to be the only person admitted into the sick-room.

Meanwhile, amid all the noise and tumult consequent upon the removal of the Countess von Detmar from her summer residence, poor Engelchen

lay tossing about in feverish unrest, quite unconscious of all that was going on. The fever ran high, and in her delirious wanderings it was in the old familiar paths she trod—the past few months being apparently obliterated from her mind—and mother, Friedel, and the good old Gerte, were the only names which escaped her lips from time to time. Both doctor and nurse attended to their duties in the most exemplary manner, and after a time of much anxiety, the former pronounced his little patient out of danger.

When first restored to consciousness, Engelchen's eyes wandered everywhere, as if in search of some familiar face; but too weak for any continuous effort, the eyelids closed again, and sleep soon lulled the little one to rest—a silent tear-drop alone bearing witness to her unsatisfied heart-longings after something her lips refused to utter.

The nurse, a tall hard-featured woman, although inured to scenes of pain and distress, could not but pity the poor little child, and whilst supplying her with every possible comfort and delicacy, she spoke kindly and even soothingly to her; but what amount of pity, or of the kindness which springs *merely* therefrom, can ever compensate for the absence of true affection!

During the many days of weakness and prostration she was called to endure, there was no

loving mother so soothe and comfort poor Engelchen — no mother's hand to smooth the pillow in her weary tossings to and fro, and kiss and fondle her till the bitterness of the medicine was forgotteh ! The little one panted after love, and there was none to satisfy her longing desires.

At last all fear of infection was past, the nurse was dismissed, and Engelchen removed to the housekeeper's apartments. With the gradual return of strength, the powers of memory and thought became more and more busy, and many were the questions she now asked ; but the housekeeper was no longer so kind as she used to be, and the only answer she vouchsafed too frequently was, " You must be quiet—play with your toys there, and don't trouble other people !" and so, after repeated rebuffs, the poor child learned by degrees to speak as little as possible. During the absence of the Countess, it was evidently considered unnecessary to make any exertion whatever to please or amuse her little *protégée*.

During the winter months, Engelchen was closely confined to the housekeeper's rooms, where she was often left to her own devices, for hours at a time. When tired playing with her toys, she used to climb up on a high chair at the window ; and there, on her knees, watch with the greatest interest the movements of the numerous birds

which were attracted to the grounds by the plentiful supply of bread crumbs daily provided for them by her tiny fingers. Many of them had grown so tame as to hop about on the window sill, unscared even by her presence, and this caused the child the most intense pleasure.

Having climbed to her accustomed place at the window one beautiful clear frosty day, Engelchen was looking out upon the thick covering of unsullied snow which everywhere met her gaze, and admiring with wondering delight the multiform branches and twigs of trees and shrubs, as their white feathery burdens glittered in the brilliant sunshine, when suddenly the great stillness of nature was broken by the music of bells which came floating towards her. As the sounds came nearer and nearer, the child's curiosity became more and more intense.

At length the gate at the foot of the avenue was thrown open; and a beautiful sleigh, drawn by richly caparisoned horses, whose gay coloured plumes and bright tinkling bells called forth exclamations of delight from the solitary little onlooker, now dashed up at a rapid pace, and halted before the large porch of the château. Sleigh after sleigh followed; but Engelchen's attention was too much absorbed to notice anything further, for in the lovely lady now about to alight she recog-

nised a well-known face, and a host of old recollections flashed in a moment through her mind; then, without stopping to consider the consequences of disobedience, she flew towards the door, which, after some trouble, she managed to unfasten, and away she ran to the drawing-room, which the Countess and her friends had just entered. Accustomed as she had been to scenes such as these, Engelchen seemed to have no fear; but hurriedly glancing round the handsomely dressed ladies and gentlemen, she ran forward with undaunted courage towards the beautiful Countess von Detmar, who had been such a kind friend to her. But a ruder shock than any yet encountered by the little orphan was in store for her.

A half-suppressed murmur of voices made the Countess turn quickly round from the gentleman with whom she was conversing, and her eyes fell full upon the little figure now within a few steps of her. Totally unprepared for the terrible change in the appearance of the child whom she had petted so much, and on whom she had lavished all the tenderness of her nature, the Countess drew back with instinctive horror, and uttering an exclamation of irrepressible repugnance, she cried out, "Oh, what a hideous object! who could believe that that child was exquisitively beautiful when found by me only a few months ago? Alas!

alas! what an ugly child she is now! Why was I not told of this terrible change?"

The tiny arms which had been stretched out for the expected embrace fell helpless by her side, and Engelchen stood staring at the Countess in a maze of bewilderment. The light of joy and love faded as if by magic from her eyes, and the stony look of cruelly disappointed hopes and wounded feelings was soon quenched in a gush of tears. At this moment her arm was grasped in anything but a gentle manner by the housekeeper, who, after a sharp reprimand for her disobedience to orders, made a most humble apology to the Countess for this unfortunate disturbance.

"You can retire now, Oppermann!" was the only reply she received; and poor Engelchen was marched off in disgrace.

The Countess had some reason to feel both annoyed and affronted; most of her guests had heard about the beautiful little foundling whom she had taken home and treated as if she had been her own child, and now to have her presented to them in such a state! It was mortifying in the extreme, and the Countess was exceedingly displeased.

Busily occupied all morning with the necessary preparations for the expected guests, the housekeeper had entirely neglected poor Engelchen, rely-

ing, as she had done, upon having time enough to dress and make her look as nice as possible before the Countess should ask to see her. In her own mind she had resolved to watch for a favourable opportunity, when she might prepare the Countess for the terrible change which the smallpox had wrought in the appearance of her little favourite. The long silky ringlets gone, and the smooth velvet cheeks dotted all over with spots not yet robbed of their deep red colour; truly the poor child was in no fit condition to present to these elegantly-dressed fashionable ladies and gentlemen.

" You wicked, ungrateful little girl, how did you dare to leave my rooms, and thrust yourself unbidden among those grand ladies and gentlemen ? And in such a dirty plight too—bringing disgrace and mischief upon my head in this way !" exclaimed the housekeeper in great wrath, accompanying her words by sundry sharp shakes and jerks, till on reaching her own sitting-room, she flung the door open, and with a final shake and push, which landed poor Engelchen with a crash on the floor, she screamed out in a yet louder, angrier tone, " There now, you can roar as much as you like, for nobody will hear you ! You'll suffer for all this mischief yet, you little wretched beggar !" and closing the door, she locked it, leaving the bewildered, terrified child alone in her misery.

Scarcely had the sound of the housekeeper's retreating feet died away, when tears and sobs came in plentiful measure to relieve the overburdened heart of the solitary little orphan. Never in her life had she been treated in such a cruel manner before; and then she could not understand why the beautiful lady had covered her face and called her an ugly child, and would not allow her to touch her, just because she had not on a pretty dress. After long and weary watchings for the sound of approaching feet, for hope began to revive, and she thought that the kind lady would surely send for her and make her happy again, the little one's cravings after food for the body and love for the soul were stilled for the time being, as sweet sleep laid her to rest in the large comfortable arm-chair.

Meanwhile the evening was spent by the Countess with her lively, fashionable friends, in feasting and enjoyment; no painful thoughts regarding the child whom she had caressed, loved, and petted—then cast from her as a hated thing when the loveliness had faded from her cheeks—came to mar her happiness, evidently; for she was as gay and merry as any one of her guests.

When the housekeeper looked upon the sleeping Engelchen that night, as she lay huddled together in the corner of the arm-chair, feelings of remorse

sprang up within her; and wiping the tear-stains from her face, she undressed and covered her up comfortably in bed, saying to herself, "Why, the child's not so ugly after all! She's suffered enough anyhow, poor little creature—how could we all be so hard-hearted as to forget her, and send her nothing to eat, when every one in the house was feasting but herself? But I'll make up for it to-morrow, that I shall!" And the good resolution was not forgotten; for many tempting little morsels were placed before Engelchen on the breakfast table next morning; and more highly prized than all, some kindly words, and a little considerate petting were bestowed upon her by the house-keeper, who was really not devoid of human kindness.

From her chair at the window, Engelchen watched the sleighs in silence, as one after the other drew up before the porch, and then glided away up the avenue, each with its complement of ladies and gentlemen, covered with magnificent furs; but when the last one came forward, and the next minute the Countess von Detmar appeared on the steps, she uttered a heart-breaking cry of pain; and springing from her kneeling posture to her feet, she never raised her eyes from the lovely being she had learned to love, until she was borne from her sight; when, slipping down from her

chair, she threw herself upon the floor, and cried and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Before her departure, the Countess von Detmar told the housekeeper that it was now impossible for her to take Engelchen with her, as she had intended to do—the child was too sadly disfigured, and it would only cause her pain and distress to have her near her; she could not, in fact, look at her without feelings of repugnance.

With some degree of timidity—for she had not quite recovered from the effects of her disgrace—the housekeeper ventured to remark, “But may it please your ladyship, the poor little thing may yet out-grow this, and be as pretty as ever she was.”

“Oh, do you really think that possible?” interposed the Countess, whilst a gleam of pleasure shot from her beautiful eyes.

“Yes, indeed, I do, my lady! And besides, both the doctor and nurse told me that they thought the child might not be marked at all after a time; and her hair is already growing fast, my lady, and——”

“Well, well; however that may be,” interrupted the Countess, “she is now so ugly and repulsive-looking, that I can’t bear the idea of seeing her again, for the present at least. So you must just watch over her, and try to keep her out of harm’s way. If only we could discover a clue whereby

her friends might be communicated with, probably they might be glad enough to have their lost one restored to them. Meanwhile, be kind to the poor child, and take good care of her till I come back again. The name, Engelchen, seems to me now little better than a mockery—call her Anna."





CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE ANNA'S DRIVE AND ITS RESULTS.

IT was a dreary, unnatural life which the little orphan led during these long winter months. Thrown, as she was, very much upon her own resources, she seemed to live in a little world of her own creating; and whilst playing with her toys, or wandering about alone over the deserted château, old thoughts and feelings connected with her earlier life—which had been crushed out of her mind, by the continual whirl of excitement in which she had been kept, when with the Countess von Detmar—began to come back with ever-increasing vividness.

With the exception of washing and dressing her, Oppermann took very little notice of her little charge, leaving her to do very much as she chose, and so it came to pass, that no sooner had the lovely spring weather set in than Anna, as she was now called, was seldom in the house, she finding it so much more enjoyable to roam about all over

the property. There was always something going on to engage her attention and interest, and as a rule the little solitary child was ever welcomed with a smile or friendly nod of recognition by the gardeners and out-door servants, when too busily occupied to speak with her.

Although in her solitude, the child's heart often longed for the friends she had lost, she was far from being really unhappy. Never did she tire watching the progress of the fresh-budding trees, shrubs, and lovely spring flowers; and a daily source of sweet enjoyment for her lay in her visits to the poultry yard, with supplies of food for the numerous fowls and pretty little chickens, which used to flock round her the moment she made her appearance.

Meanwhile, a marked improvement had been taking place in her outward appearance; free exposure to the fresh balmy breezes of spring having gradually brought back the bloom of health to her cheeks—the rough skin had all peeled off, and the objectionable crimson spots had almost entirely disappeared, whilst the fair silky hair was fast assuming the old wavy, curly appearance, and might doubtless ere now have been twisted into ringlets, had loving fingers been there to undertake the task.

Little Anna had scarcely finished her dinner

one day, when the noise of wheels suddenly attracted her attention ; and springing forward to the window, she quickly mounted her chair and looked out with no small degree of curiosity. The noise became more and more distinct ; and in the course of a few minutes a pretty green-painted waggon, drawn by a fine brown horse, was seen approaching the gate of the court-yard. With her face pressed against the window pane, Anna eagerly watched the movements of the driver, who now alighted and went forward to meet the steward, who had just come out of his house. After a few minutes' conversation, the two men walked away together, leaving the horse to enjoy a good feed of corn.

The instant she saw the steward and the peasant disappear within the garden gate, little Anna slipped down from her chair and ran away to the court-yard as fast as she could. After walking round and examining the pretty waggon with great interest, she climbed up and began to spring about in it like a wild thing, so greatly did she enjoy the novelty. The air was clear, the sky serene, and all nature smiled in the bright sunshine ; and youthful buoyancy, too, triumphing over every obstacle, the little orphan exulted for joy and gladness.

Only a short time had elapsed, however, when

the steward and the peasant again made their appearance. No sooner did the former catch sight of the child, than in sudden wrath at the unwarrantable liberty, he exclaimed, whilst raising his cane, "Get out of there, will you, this instant, you naughty, forward child!"

With scared terrified looks, little Anna was about to spring to the ground, when rushing forward, the peasant, a goodnatured-looking man of most respectable appearance, caught her in his arms, and, putting her gently down, said, "There, little one, don't look so frightened—no harm's done!" Which gently spoken words drew forth a tearful look of gratitude. Something in the child's neglected appearance touched a cord of sympathy in this peasant's kindly nature, and turning round, he said to the steward, "Is this your little daughter?"

"Oh dear, no," he replied, with a shrug of his broad shoulders; "she's a foundling whom the Countess von Detmar picked up, somewhere or other, and brought here. When found, she was really a very pretty child, and her ladyship made a great pet of her, till the smallpox robbed her of her beauty, and after that she couldn't bear the sight of her, and so she's been left here to be in everybody's way."

Looking down at poor little Anna, who, mean-

while, had been standing at his side, listening eagerly with wide open eyes to this strange revelation, the kind-hearted peasant said, whilst gently stroking her fair silky hair, "Would you like to have a drive with me in this pretty waggon, little one?"

"Oh yes, I would very much!" was the quick reply, accompanied, however, by the peculiar startled look, so usual to her now since she had been repelled and scolded so much.

"Well, then, you must have a little patience, for I must first see my plants and saplings safely deposited in the waggon, and then you can come part of the way with me if the steward here has no objection."

"I've nothing to say against it; besides it's the housekeeper who has the charge of her. I've nothing whatever to do with her," said the steward, sulkily.

When permission was asked from the housekeeper, her reply was, "You're quite welcome to take her, sir; I'll be glad enough to be quit of her for a little."

"Well, then, if that's the case, I may just as well take her all the way with me to Hendorf, and then she can have a whole day's enjoyment, and I can bring her back to-morrow or next day. I've a great liking for children, and I'll gladly give this little girl a treat."

"Take her, then, by all means, and you can bring her back when most convenient for yourself—only take good care of her!"

When the young trees and plants which he had just purchased from the steward had been all carefully packed into the waggon, the peasant lifted little Anna up in his arms, and placing her on the front seat, he sprang nimbly up beside her, saying, "Now then, little one, your patience will be rewarded!" and cracking his long whip, away the good horse started at a rapid pace.

The little orphan was soon quite at her ease, her shy frightened ways (really foreign to her nature) very quickly disappearing in the genial atmosphere of the present. As they drove along, the peasant became more and more interested in the child, and displayed the greatest patience and good humour in listening to and answering the numerous questions addressed to him by her. After a time, however, her innocent prattle fell unheeded upon his ears, he evidently being entirely occupied with his own thoughts. In the course of conversation, Anna had told him from time to time little snatches of her sad story, which had stirred up within him memories of the past; and now the few particulars related by the steward came back with full force to his mind; and "Oh, can it be possible, I wonder?" escaped from his

lips, as with sudden energy he cracked his whip, and the good horse soon brought them in sight of Hendorf.

The afternoon was beautiful; and the gorgeous colours of the sky, deepening by degrees, till the sun at last disappeared behind the distant hills, filled the child's heart with joy, and many were the exclamations of delight she uttered.

"Only look, what bright lights! Are they fires?" she cried.

"No, no, little one; 'tis just the kind sun showing off our village to the best advantage. Look yonder, Anna! to the right of those houses; that pretty white one is my home—there, nestling among the fruit trees—don't you see it?"

"Yes, yes; I see it now, and we'll soon be there!"

"Tell me, Anna," asked the peasant, after a few moments' reflection; "did anybody ever call you Engelchen?"

Months had elapsed since the child had heard the name; but little time was needed to bring back the sweet recollections of the past, and with a look of mingled surprise and joy she replied, "The beautiful lady always called me Engelchen; and mother, and Friedel, and the good old Gerte too!" she added with a beaming countenance.

By this time they had passed through the

village, and were driving along a broad path by the side of an extensive orchard. With a hurried glance at each, the peasant's eyes wandered over the fine trees, covered for the most part with buds, which had not yet, however, entirely parted with their brown coating; only here and there a tiny blossom shone forth like a white star, whilst pretty white daisies glimmered among the green blades of the beautiful young grass, springing up in all directions.

Suddenly, from among the trees, a boy came bounding forward, exclaiming, "Good evening, father, dear! Mother and I have been very busy, and have almost finished the potatoes. Look here, I've only these few left!" pointing to the large pocket of his blue apron.

"That's right, my boy," replied the peasant, heartily, still screening little Anna from his view; "and I have brought something with me to reward your diligence—there, take my whip!"—and springing lightly to the ground, he lifted the child out, and presenting her to him, said, "You shall have a whole holiday to-morrow, my son, that you may please and amuse our little visitor."

For a few moments the children stood staring at each other in speechless amazement. Friedel, for he it was, grew deadly pale; then, with a cry of joy, "Oh, Engelchen! our lost Engelchen at

last!" he exclaimed, almost wild with delight, as he clasped her in his arms and kissed her over and over again.

The joyful surprise seemed well-nigh too much for the poor children, after so long and so painful a separation. Frau Marianne Herder was coming forward to look over the purchases which her husband had made, when suddenly she stopped, as she caught sight of Friedel on his knees, with his arms closely entwined round a little girl, whilst both were evidently in a state of the greatest excitement, and turning to her husband she asked in surprise, "Why, whatever is all this, goodman? What child is that you have brought?"

Quite overcome by the touching scene, her husband, who was standing looking at the children with his hands firmly clasped in front of him, said by way of reply, "Just look at those dear children—truly their happiness seems unbounded! By the merest chance it was, that I brought the little girl with me. She seemed so pleased to be in our newly-painted waggon. I felt sorry for her, too, and wished to give her a treat. Well, as we were driving along, all her shyness fled away, and she told me a good deal about herself, which set me thinking, until I felt more and more convinced that our Friedel's long lost Engelchen was sitting beside me; and sure enough I've been right—for

look at them. Oh, what happiness is theirs at this moment!"

With a heart full of motherly sympathy, Frau Herder gently pushed Friedel aside, and taking the little excited girl up in her arms, she kissed her fondly, saying, "You little darling, God be praised for restoring you to your dear brother, who has so bitterly fretted over your loss! Would that the good old Gerte were here to rejoice with us!" Anna, meantime, had been silently studying the good woman's face, which by degrees she came fully to recognise; and smiles soon irradiated her flushed little face. "Now, Friedel, I was right after all, you see! The poor little dear does not look as if she had been clothed in silk and driving about in a grand carriage. Only look how torn and soiled her dress is!"

"Ah, perhaps that has been the case, however," interposed the peasant, "for the Countess von Detmar, in whose beautiful château the child has been living, took her about everywhere with her, it seems, and made a great pet of her before the smallpox came to spoil her beauty, after which she could not bear to look at her; and so the poor little thing has been left to run wild."

"Well, wonders will never cease, goodman! But we must hear the whole story afterwards—our poor horse should have been attended to long

ago." And putting little Anna gently down, she and her husband unpacked the tender saplings and plants, whilst Friedel unyoked the horse and gave him his supper.

Shortly after this, when seated round the table in the comfortable parlour, enjoying their evening meal, the peasant and Engelchen by turns related, as far as they knew, all that had taken place since the latter had run away in search of her brother. "And what is to be done with the little darling now that we have found her?" was a question which fell upon Friedel's happy heart like an icicle.

"I promised to take her back safely to the housekeeper to-morrow, or the day after that," said Herr Georg Herder meditatively; then, after a few seconds, "Why, Friedel seems a changed lad already, Marianne; he has not half the love for us I believe that he has for his little sister, and yet he has never said one word of thanks to me for having brought her back to him!" and it was true. So overjoyed had the excited boy been, he had quite forgotten to whom he owed this delightful surprise. But his beaming countenance and eyes full of love which rested on Engelchen, were surely sufficient thanks and reward! And so felt the kind-hearted peasant in reality—his words having been merely uttered in jest.

After the children were in bed that night, a long, serious conversation took place between husband and wife regarding their future prospects ; Frau Herder taking good care to bring prominently before him the blessings which had accrued to them since Friedel had been adopted by them.

"What you say is all very true, dear wife ; but surely you can't seriously wish to keep the little girl as well as her brother ?"

"And what, then, would you propose to do with the poor infant ?" said Frau Herder eagerly. "All I can say is, if you intend to take her back to the château, you must just take Friedel too, and let the Countess keep them both ; for I can't stand by and look upon these loving hearts being torn from each other again. I should rather part with my beloved boy than that !"

"There, don't get excited, Marianne, dear. I have no wish to act contrary to your wishes in this matter ; but I was thinking, leaving the expense out of the question, the extra trouble and labour imposed upon you might prove too much for you."

"Oh, if that is all you have to say against it, the question will soon be settled !" exclaimed Frau Herder exultingly. "Only to think of that dear little lamb being petted and fondled as she was at first, and then cast away with abhorrence

when her outward beauty was gone! But, really, I think the child is now as pretty as ever she was; why, there is scarcely a mark to be seen on her face, and after I have combed and brushed her tangled hair, you will soon see beautiful ringlets again!"

The exuberant joy and happiness experienced by the two children, it is impossible to describe. The prospect of parting did not disturb them much, for, childlike, they lived in the present, and the sunshine in which they were basking was too bright to admit of a cloud. As hand in hand, from early morning, they wandered about, or sat beneath the shade of the verandah, or in the tasteful little arbour at the foot of the garden, conversation never flagged; so much had they to tell each other—so many incidents of the past to recall, both before and during their long separation—games, too, never played since they parted, were now remembered and entered into with all the vigour of by-gone pleasure.

It was towards evening before the peasant returned from the neighbouring town, whither he had gone immediately after his morning duties had been attended to, for the double purpose of seeing the Countess von Detmar, and relieving his sister's mind as to the safety of the lost Engelchen.

The moment she had heard the joyful tidings,

the good old Gerte begged her brother to drive her out with him that she might see her "little darling"—and now, with the foundling folded close to her breast, it was truly touching to behold the good woman's delight, as she kissed and wept over her with an excess of joy.

The thought of separation seemed suddenly to flash into the mind of Friedel, for, taking hold of his father's hand, he asked eagerly, "Must Engelchen go back to the housekeeper to-morrow ?"

"No; not to-morrow, my boy—guess again !

"The day after, father ?"

"Oh, that's enough !" interrupted Frau Herder. "Don't keep the dear lad any longer in suspense. She is to live with us always, and never go away at all. You are to be both of you from henceforth our dear children so long as God spares us together. Are you then satisfied, my dear ones ?" And the warm-hearted woman drew them close to her, and kissed them lovingly, whilst tears of joy ran down her cheeks.

"And now," exclaimed the peasant, with a beaming countenance, "I have good news to tell you ! I saw the Countess von Detmar this morning ; she received me most kindly, and expressed her willingness to hand over Engelchen to our care without further inquiry. Her ladyship promised to have all the dear child's toys sent to her; and

gave me one hundred thalers to put in the savings bank for her."

The glad news was received amid shouts of rejoicing, the happy children embracing and kissing each other in a perfect ecstasy of delight.

"May God bless you, and grant you much joy and happiness in these dear children!" said Gertrude, reverently, feeling now truly grateful that, at last, she could think of the departed mother with a peaceful contented mind.

"Amen! God grant that all your good wishes may be fulfilled;" and laying one hand on the brown curly head, and the other on the soft silky hair of their newly-adopted child, Engelchen, the peasant added, "God bless you both, my children!"

E. J. S.



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META FRANTZ;

OR,

A SUNDAY AT LUCERNE.



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CHAPTER I.

THE warm sunbeams of a lovely summer morning had lighted up Lake Lucerne, and the deep blue of a cloudless sky was faithfully pictured on its waters.

Countless villages, shaded by the graceful acacia and lime trees, and adorned here and there by a picturesque little church, lay fringing the quiet lake. Then glancing upwards and all around, the eye surveys a glorious range of mountains; and as we gaze on their snow-clad peaks, a sudden awe steals over us; but amidst the silent grandeur of the scene these words seem whispered, "Our Heavenly Father made them all." God's works are ever perfect in their loveliness; but it is in the early hours of a Sabbath morning that the

thoughtful mind sees all nature invested with new charms, and the tiny leaf, the flowers, and murmuring stream tell something of their Maker's love.

Thrice welcome was the day of rest to a small English party, who, after weeks of wandering, were now sojourning on the banks of Lake Lucerne. The Sabbath bells of a Protestant church chimed softly with a home-like tone; but as a German service preceded the English one, a lady of the party, whom we shall call Aunt Grace, strolled in the meantime to the edge of the lake, and, seated below a spreading tree, she began to read some verses of God's Word. But what makes the old lady shut her book and rise so suddenly? Now she is talking to a little girl, and her kind eyes look pleased, yet half reprovingly, as she bends over her. Aunt Grace had been reading these precious words from the Epistle to the Romans: "I was found of them that sought me not;" and remembering the open shops, and numbers of pleasure-seekers whom she had seen that morning, she lifted her heart in prayer to the Good Shepherd, asking Him to follow those thoughtless ones who know Him not, and in His own good time to bring them safely to His fold.

Thus occupied, her ear caught the wild notes of a Tyrolese air; and as the sweet sounds came nearer, she observed that the singers were a beauti-

ful little girl and a fine manly boy, who might be one year older than his companion.

Naturally a lover of children, Aunt Grace regarded the youthful pair attentively; and as she was admiring the girl's coarse, yet scrupulously white dress, and her Swiss hat, whose scarlet ribbon contrasted well with her dark hair and bright eyes, she saw the child start, then run towards her, and speaking in broken English, she said, "Good day, lady; this be Meta Frantz." Another glance at Meta, as she stood smiling with a basket of cakes over her arm, and Aunt Grace remembered that she had seen the same little face in one of the adjoining valleys only two days before; and that while a gentleman of the party was admiring a cluster of exquisite roses which hung from a cottage window, Meta, overhearing his remarks, had gathered several of the finest, and with blushes and curtsies had brought them to the door of the carriage.

She understood English pretty well, but had been greatly pleased when addressed in German, which was the language of her native valley. With the utmost *naïveté* she told her name and history, saying that "her father and mother were dead, but that she lived in that pretty cottage with her aunt, who was a laundress." Her intelligent replies and playful manner impressed the whole party favour-

ably ; and when Aunt Grace expressed regret that she had not a little packet of German books with her, Meta smiled, and politely attempting to make a remark in English, she said, "Never trouble, lady ; I be pleased much to serve the strangers." And with these words the little maid ran gaily forward and opened a large gate, through which she knew the carriage was going to pass. All this, and Meta's merry laugh at parting, Aunt Grace remembered perfectly ; but as she gazed on the bright face that Sabbath morning, a feeling of sadness stole over her, for the little one prattled thoughtlessly on, telling of the "famous holiday which she and Ulric Kuhn, her companion, were to have that day." The conversation was carried on in German ; but we presume that some of our little readers may not be conversant with that language, so this and all the subsequent dialogues shall be given in English. Meta was in great glee, for she anticipated a charming sail to Weggis, which is a pretty village at the foot of the Righi. "We are to land at Weggis," she added gaily ; "and after eating our cakes, Ulric and I shall wander up the mountain, and I will fill my basket with nuts, fruits, and wild flowers."

"But you are not going to climb the Righi without a guide ?" said Aunt Grace.

"Ah, lady, you forget that we are Swiss children,

and know the paths," replied Meta; "the best raspberries grow only a little way up. But before ascending, we are going to see Ulric's uncle, who is a guide, and if he says that a storm is coming, we shall remain below."

"That is right," said Aunt Grace, "for we ought always to follow the advice of our guide."

Then speaking gently, but very earnestly, the old lady asked: "My child, did you ever hear of another and a better guide, even God who lives in heaven? This is His day, Meta, and He bids us go to His house that we may pray to Him, and be taught the way to heaven."

For a moment the little girl's eyes were downcast, and she looked perplexed; then brightening suddenly, she replied: "I know that there is a God who lives a long way off, and some day when I am big I shall learn about Him."

Fain would Aunt Grace have taken the child upon her knee and spoken to her of the kind Father above, and of Jesus who pleads especially for the little ones, saying, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." But before the good lady had time to say more, a merry whistle from the pier summoned Meta; and there stood Ulric waving his hand, to show that the little pleasure-ship, with its green railings and awnings of pure

white, was about to move off. Meta then dropped a low curtsy; and throwing back her long curls as she nodded adieu, Aunt Grace perceived that she wore ear-rings, which were apparently of diamonds, and those seemed of no ordinary brilliancy. "Strange that a peasant girl should possess such gems!" thought the lady; then the question, "Can they be stolen?" suggested itself, and with it came a feeling of pain, lest one so fair and bright should thus early have trodden a downward path, and perhaps in the morning of life these little hands had been lent to crime. Such thoughts make Aunt Grace sad; but a lowly follower of Him who never judgeth harshly, she does not hastily condemn; but casting Meta where for many a long year every burden of joy or sorrow had been laid, she beseeches the Lord to undertake, and in His hands she leaves the object of her care.

When this vast world has passed away, and eternity rises before us, then, and only then, can we know the value of prayer; and in that blessed land, where no secrets are hidden, the Christian shall discover that faith's feeblest cry was wafted to the mercy-seat. Ay, and among yon ransomed throng, whose voices swell the song of love, there may be those for whom broken hearts have prayed, and bitter tears have flowed! Then take comfort, praying ones; for when you pray,

“The Holy Spirit pleads,
And Jesus on the eternal throne
For mourners intercedes.”

Perhaps our little friends would like to know something more about Aunt Grace? She was one whom all loved. Self was absent from her thoughts; and the merry tale, or sad complaint, found in her a ready listener. In early life her cup of happiness was full. She married an Indian officer when young; and for seven bright years the stream of time flowed smoothly on; but alas! her brave husband found a soldier's grave. He died when fighting on the battle-field. The young widow then left India; and, with a little boy and girl, she sought her childhood's home among the sunny lanes of Devonshire.

Her little ones cheered the first years of widowhood; but death, the stern “reaper,” who had snatched away her prop, must needs have the “flowerets” too, and Tom and Edith were taken in their infant years to that fair garden whose blossoms never fade, and where sorrow cannot enter.

Poor Aunt Grace! Long years had passed since these sad trials, and her grey locks told of advancing age. All her pleasures were found in promoting the welfare of others. Grief's chastening hand gave new sweetness to her character; the poor, as

well as the rich, called her their friend ; and her gentle footsteps had often brought sunshine to the dreary cottage. Now she had been chosen by a merry party of nephews and nieces to accompany them during a tour on the Continent. Singularly accomplished, Aunt Grace talked several languages fluently ; her pronunciation might be a little defective, and she would good-naturedly laugh at her blunders ; while the young folks always found her presence to be an incentive rather than a check to their pleasure.

After Meta's departure, the old lady's shady bower was invaded by her friends, who came to summon her to church. Nor did they forget to ask the eager, and, with young travellers, the oft-repeated question : "Any adventures this morning, auntie ?"

Great interest was evinced as Aunt Grace detailed her encounter with Meta ; while expressions of concern for her welfare, mingled with various conjectures about the history of the diamond ear-rings followed. Nor did their wondering cease until they were seated in church, and the first solemn notes of the organ called them to shut out from their eyes and hearts, for a time, the beautiful book of nature, and in the stillness of that Sabbath morning to worship God. When the eye has been feasted with magnificent scenery, and the mind

grows almost weary of contemplating the alternate grandeur of mountain peak, blue lake, or glacier, it is delightful to rest in the quiet valley. How needful is it also to retire at times from the bright scenes of pleasure, and to listen to Christ's simple truths, falling with the same purity in a foreign land, and shedding their precious light on the Popery and infidelity around! A simple Gospel sermon was preached in the English church at Lucerne that morning, the text being from these words: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee." The beauties of this lower world, with God's image mirrored everywhere, and the glories of heaven, were spoken of; while the minister urged his people earnestly to give to the Father of love the first place in their hearts. But we are not going to preach the good man's sermon over again, dear children, and shall now leave Aunt Grace and her young party to retire from God's house, and to spend a happy Sunday near the blue lake, wandering perhaps to the old cathedral, where they may learn a lesson from the strangely carved inscriptions which mark where the quiet dead are laid.

We shall not linger over these pleasant Sabbath hours at Lucerne, although we doubt not that they live in the memory of each; and all recollect how Aunt Grace's gentle influence was ever exerted

heavenwards. At present we bid adieu to the valley, and follow Meta and her companion, whom we left entering a pleasure-boat which was to convey them to the village of Weggis. Brightly shone the little faces as their bark sped swiftly over the clear waters. Ulric soon made friends with a fine St Bernard's dog, which belonged to one of the guides. It had been brought from another part of Switzerland, but seemed a true specimen of that noble breed ; and its master told many tales of its having rescued little children who were buried in the snow. Ulric and Meta stood with eyes and mouth wide open while the dog's master told of its brave exploits ; and presently the impulsive Meta was kneeling on the deck, and, with her little fat arms round its neck, she kept assuring the good dog that it should have all her cakes. Ulric slightly disapproved of this arrangement, however ; and doggie soon settled the matter, for after having eaten one small cake, he wagged his tail, and licking Meta's face in a patronising manner, he walked majestically to another part of the deck, and with wistful eyes he stood gazing at the snow mountains. So charming was the sail, and so happy were the young folks, that they could not believe it had come to an end, until, stopping at the pier, they saw the green trees and cottages of Weggis. Ulric's uncle was there to meet them,

carrying a little rosy-cheeked boy in his arms. He had not taken any party up the Righi that day; and being a zealous Roman Catholic, he had just returned from attending early mass in the beautiful church of Kussnacht. That lovely spot lies at the other side of the mountain, so he had sailed thither in the morning. The children were soon running in their friend's garden. Nor were they long in discovering a famous cherry-tree; and there they lingered, until their rosy lips were blackened with juice, and a call from within summoned them to dinner. A snowy cloth covered the table, while a dish of honey, some cheese, and a basin of milk were added to Meta's cakes; and before finishing their meal, each child had a slice of Sunday pudding, which was composed of brown bread, eggs, and chocolate. But the extreme neatness and refinement of a Swiss cottage give a charm to the most simple fare. The guide and his wife were unwilling to detain the children, for the weather was fine, and they knew that they loved a ramble on the mountain. Hazel nut-trees grew near the base; while the grassy slopes of the Righi were in many places bright with flowers; and Meta had visions of climbing to a spot where scarlet berries and gay velvet-tufted plants were to be found.

“Do not forget to come back before sunset,

Ulric," said the guide, "for you must sail to Lucerne to-night." Then placing his hand on Meta's shoulder, he asked, "Where got you these ear-rings, my pretty one? Surely they must have belonged to gentlefolks?"

A crimson flush suffused the little girl's cheek; and turning away her head, she said, in faltering tones, "Oh, I found them."

"Found them," said the guide's wife. "Did you know they were diamonds, and would bring lots of money?"

"No," replied Meta, now looking up, "I did not know the name of the stones."

"But where did you find them?" resumed the guide.

"Come, tell us, child," said his wife.

Poor Meta held down her head; but at this juncture a loud cry issued from the cradle, and the good woman's thoughts were soon engrossed in soothing her little boy, who was just awaking from his sleep.

The children then rose to go; but Ulric's uncle looked grave as he said, "I am afraid, little girl, that there is something not right about these ear-rings. And remember, if you have taken them, evil is sure to happen; so you had better go and tell all to the priest."

Dear children, the guide acted according to his

knowledge. He had not been taught that we may go direct to God with every sin, and ask Him to forgive us for Christ's sake. But you know that no man can take away sin,—it is the blood of Jesus Christ alone which can do that.

Tears stood in Meta's eyes while Rodolph was speaking; but she did not say anything, and, taking her hand, Ulric led her silently away.





CHAPTER II.

WHEN the children were alone, Meta remarked: "Ulric, those ear-rings don't make me so happy as I expected. They shine brightly; and this morning I felt proud because they looked grander than those our neighbour Gritly wore; but now I wish I had never seen them."

"Come, don't bother yourself," he replied; "let us throw them into a well."

"No, no!" exclaimed the little girl, "for your aunt says they are made of diamonds."

"Diamonds! then, Meta, you had better look out; for if the theft be discovered, you may be put into prison."

"Oh dear, dear!" sobbed Meta, now in great distress.

But a loud laugh from Ulric checked her grief; and putting his arm round her waist, he called her "a little fool, who could not take a joke;" then, pointing to a gay butterfly which was just

fitting past, he exclaimed, "Come, we must have a race for that beautiful prize!"

In a few minutes the bright creature, with its orange-coloured wings, was no longer free, for Ulric had it safely within a pasteboard box.

Meta's spirits were now partially restored; and sometimes climbing over rugged precipices, or wandering in deep ravines, the little people feasted on the mountain fruits. Higher and higher did they climb; while picturesque windings gave glimpses of the lakes below, and showed the Alpine range which stretched beyond.

The sun was hot, and the children grew weary. Meta's basket was full of treasures; but a cruel thorn had pierced her foot, and now it ached with pain. Only part of the tormentor had been extracted, but the poor child limped bravely along for a little way; at length her heart sickened as she saw the long homeward journey before her, and big tears rose to her eyes.

"Try not to think about it," were Ulric's words of comfort. Yet with each footstep came a stinging pain; and not the fairy scenes around, or the groups of wayfarers as they passed, could interest poor Meta now. Parties riding on horseback, and pedestrians toiling upwards, staff in hand, went by. A hermit, in his robe of brown, looked kindly at the children, then turned away to tell his beads;

while a French lady gave them some grapes; but when Meta told her of her trouble, she shook her head, showing that she could not understand.

On a rustic seat, beside a projecting rock, which the ivy had covered with its verdure, there rested a young Englishman. His dress was clerical, and judging from his pale, haggard looks, he seemed to be seeking health in the mountain's breezes. Just then his thoughts were somewhat sad: he had conducted service in the hotel at the top of the Righi that morning, but he felt that his words of exhortation had been cold and lifeless. God in His providence had laid him aside from the duties of his parish, and sent him to a foreign clime; but the pure air of Switzerland brought no strength to his weary frame; and although believing that "the Lord doeth all things well," yet sometimes the murmur of despondency would rise to his lips. "I seem to be of no use in the vineyard," he would say. Ah! he forgot Milton's words: "They also serve, who only stand and wait;" and our heavenly Father's words, which are more precious still: "Blessed are they that wait for Him." Quiet waiting is the most trying, yet is it often the most needed discipline. The God of love had heard His servant's cry; and that Sabbath afternoon he was to bear a gracious message to the young and erring of the flock. Turning his eyes from the fields and

trees which skirted the mountain's sides, he saw a little boy and girl standing near; but their childish glee seemed gone, while an air of depression was painted on the countenance of each. A few kind words, spoken in German, proved a talisman; and in the next five minutes Ulric and Meta were seated beside him, while the latter had confided the story of her aching foot.

"But you must let me see it before I can prescribe," said the clergyman, smiling. The scrutiny over, a fine needle was taken from a bag which lay in Meta's wonderful basket, and very soon the ugly thorn was placed on her dress; while the little, swollen foot had been tenderly wrapped up in a large dock leaf. A clear stream went rippling past, and Ulric, being hot and thirsty, ran off to get some water; then turning to Meta, he said, "I wish I could bring you some too." But their kind friend produced a drinking cup from a small morocco case, and the little girl was also refreshed by a cooling draught. Then asking the children to examine the cup, which was made of exquisite Bohemian glass, he showed them a representation of our Saviour sitting by a well, while he talked to the woman of Samaria.

Dear little readers, you all know that beautiful story; but these Swiss children were brought up in ignorance of the blessed Jesus, so they listened

to the minister's narrative as something very strange. He knew the pathway to young hearts well; and in a simple and instructive manner he talked to them of the Son of God. Their faces beamed with interest as he told them of His love to man; he depicted Him as the weary traveller by the well, referring to the "living water," which Christ offered to the woman, and which was more refreshing far than that stream of which they had lately drunk.

The little ones learned that the woman of Samaria was a great sinner, but that she had found her God and Saviour,—one who was acquainted with all her past history, and who also knows every thought and intention of our hearts. The text, "Thou God seest me," was new to Ulric and Meta; and while the clergyman described God as the Father of love, and Christ as the compassionate Saviour, he showed plainly that evil was hateful in Jehovah's sight. He went on to say that no darkness could hide us from His all-searching eye, and that "the Lord is in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

At these words, Meta trembled violently; and laying her hand on her friend's knee, she whispered, "Sir, is that quite true?"

"Yes, my child," he answered, gravely; "for God who cannot lie hath said it."

Then hastily taking off her diamond ear-rings, the little girl sobbed out, "Oh, dear ! what shall I do ? These ear-rings are stolen, and the kind God knows all, and is angry with me ; but I never heard before that He cared for an orphan girl like me."

Dear children, the arrow of conviction had entered the heart of this little ignorant one ; and now she grieved deeply, because she had offended the Lord. We have been taught Bible truths from our earliest years ; and let each ask his wayward heart, "Do I thus mourn for sin ?" The clergyman listened to Meta's confession ; and holding one of her trembling hands, he said gently, "You have acted wickedly ; but do not be afraid to tell me all. And if you are truly sorry for your sin, we shall ask God to forgive you for His dear Son's sake. And do you know, Meta, that when we call upon our heavenly Father, He has promised to answer us ?"

In faltering tones, and with many tears, the poor child related the story of her temptation and fall ; but her sentences being a little unconnected, we shall try to give the detail in few words.

On the previous afternoon, Meta's aunt entrusted her with a newly-washed dress, which she was to carry to a lady in Lucerne ; and on the way thither she met her little playmate Gritly, who

taunted her with being shabbily dressed, and displayed some gaudy trinkets which she had just bought. Full of envious thoughts, Meta walked through the town, casting many a longing look at the gay shop windows, but she had not a single coin; and in a particularly discontented mood she reached the hotel where the lady lived. Saturday afternoon brings a large share of bustle to the fashionable hotel in a Continental town; and while busy domestics hurried to and fro, awaiting the arrival and departure of the different visitors, Meta was desired to run up stairs to a certain room where the dress was to be deposited.

More quickly than we can write, the little maid tripped up a long flight of steps, and soon found herself in an apartment handsomely furnished. A few glances all round were very natural in a peasant girl, living in a quiet valley; and as our young friend walked towards the dressing-table, she descried an elegant casket, from which a bunch of keys was hanging. Speedy as thought, the top was opened, and Meta's wondering eyes feasted on the gems within. The child stood silently fascinated for some moments; but a pair of diamond ear-rings seemed to her more lovely than all the other jewels. "Ah! those are finer than anything which saucy Gritly wears," Meta whispered to herself, for her heart was still vexed at the remem-

brance of her companion's cruel words; then, yielding to the impulse of a sinful moment, she grasped the bright treasures, and slipped them cautiously into her pocket. Triumph that the prize was won, and a lurking fear lest she should be discovered, flitted through her mind; but escaping noiselessly from the house, she did not stop to examine the ear-rings until she had reached her aunt's little garden.

Dear children, you all think that Meta's conduct was very wrong, and it is true, for she had broken one of God's commandments; but remember no mother's voice ever taught her an infant prayer, and the blessed name of God was seldom mentioned in her home. The kind minister pitied her distress, although he thought it well to let the tears of repentance flow; and having shown her the greatness of her sin, he pointed her to Christ, the physician of the guilty soul. A fervent prayer rose from the little group by the mountain's side that Sunday afternoon; and as the children breathed their first words to heaven, we doubt not that there swelled a song of joy above. The sun's bright rays had veered towards the west, showing that sunset was at hand, and Ulric reminded Meta that they must hasten to Weggis.

"True," said their friend, "and Meta cannot descend quickly with her lame foot. But here

comes a horse without its rider; probably the guide may allow you to mount."

A few francs from the gentleman, and the guide gladly lifted the children on the horse's back. Kind farewells were spoken, while Meta promised that the stolen ear-rings should at once be restored; and followed by every good wish and prayer, the little ones resumed their homeward journey.

We believe that as the clergyman wandered slowly to the top of the Righi that evening, he realised that his Divine Master had sent him to the wayside to scatter precious seed; and God grant that on that great day, when the Husbandman gathers in His sheaves, He may find that these grains have brought forth fruit an hundredfold!

The evening shades had fallen on the day of rest, and the music of the vesper bells came floating softly on the air. A pleasure-boat is nearing Lucerne, and not far from the helm we recognise two well-known faces. In thoughtful mood our little friends are standing. Meta is the heroine of the story; but we imagine that Ulric has gained for himself a share of interest too, and having been fully awakened to the evil of sin, he no longer wishes to cloak it, but, like a brave boy, he stimulates his companion to return the fatal treasures to their owner that evening.

"Yes, Ulric, I cannot keep them till to-morrow," she replied. "But oh, that we could meet the English lady who spoke to me like the clergyman! I know she would advise me in the matter."

Passing away from the children, let us have a peep into a pretty sitting-room, whose bow windows overlook the lake; a group of young people stand round the piano; and as we listen to their voices blending softly in the hymn, "Nearer, my God, to Thee," we observe that the old lady at the piano is Aunt Grace. One hymn after another is sung in the twilight hour. At length Aunt Grace wanders to the balcony; she is smiling; but there are tears in her eyes, and her thoughts have fled away to the unending Sabbath which her lost and loved ones know. A cheerful sound on the water wakes her from her reverie, and glancing towards the pier, she sees the returning pleasure-boat; while presently its passengers are crowding on shore. Like Meta, the morning's interview rises to her thoughts; and full of interest regarding the little girl, she bends over the balcony to watch the various parties as they disperse. Only a few moments of suspense, and Ulric and Meta are standing on the pavement below.

Grasping her companion's hand, Meta whispers, "This is the hotel, and I am so ashamed." Then in a louder tone she added, "I never saw the person

to whom the ear-rings belong ; but my aunt called her Lady B——.”

“Meta !” said a clear voice overhead ; and with the quick retentiveness of a foreigner, the child knew that Aunt Grace was addressing her.

“I am here, English lady,” she replied ; “but I did not know where you lived, and I wished so much to talk to you.”

Our little readers can easily guess that Aunt Grace lost no time in joining the children ; and leading Meta into the house, she listened attentively to her half-whispered confession. “Ah ! here is an answer to prayer,” thought the good lady, “and truly the Lord’s ways are not like ours. Who should have imagined, on seeing this thoughtless little one set out for a day’s enjoyment, that she was to hear God’s voice on the mountain ; and His message sinking deeply into her heart, she now repents of her sin, and seeks pardon in the all-cleansing blood of Christ!” Meta and her friend had much earnest talk ; while the latter urged her to ask God’s help that she might do right in the future, teaching her at the same time a few simple words of prayer.

Aunt Grace had seen Lady B——, who was still at the hotel. And, taking the sparkling ear-rings from Meta’s hands, we shall follow her into a spacious drawing-room, where several of the com-

pany are assembled. Apart from the rest, Lady B—— and her husband are seated at an open window; the former is extremely young and lively; but at present she is quietly contemplating the scene without, and Aunt Grace approaches unobserved. Gently touching her ladyship on the shoulder, Aunt Grace displays the jewels; and with girlish glee the fair one snatches her lost treasures, overwhelming the old lady with thanks, nor stopping to ask where they had strayed. A smile from Aunt Grace seemed to remind her of the omission; and she eagerly inquired, "Can you tell me who took them?" Then turning playfully towards her husband, she remarked, "I left the keys in my casket, so I was afraid to tell you of my loss." The well-known story was simply told; while the young couple expressed surprise that a peasant girl should have been induced to restore anything so valuable.

"The conviction that she has done wrong makes her anxious to repair the injury at once," replied Aunt Grace

"Poor child," said Lady B——, "I should wish to give her money; only it might seem like rewarding crime."

"One thing we can do," interrupted her husband; "you say the little girl is ignorant and poor; let us give her the means of going to school."

Aunt Grace's face brightened as she answered, "Your lordship will thus confer a great kindness; and knowing a good Protestant school in the neighbourhood, I may be able to induce Meta's aunt to send her there."

Without further preface, Lord B—— handed the old lady a sum of money; and, tendering him her hearty thanks, she quietly moved away.

As the young nobleman resumed his seat, there rested an unwonted thoughtfulness on his brow; and addressing his wife, he said, "Anna, that lady is a true specimen of one who goes about doing good. There is an unobtrusive earnestness in her religion which leads one to reflect; and somehow I feel glad that, even in a trifling way, we have been enabled to assist this poor Swiss child."

Little readers, perhaps you think it strange that Meta should experience so much kindness after acting very wickedly; but you see that it was the Lord's way of drawing her to Himself. First, He permitted her to break His holy law, and then by the blessed influence of His Spirit, she was led to the foot of the cross. Remember what the hymn says:

"Never needy sinner perished there."

Varied were Meta's feelings on the evening of that eventful day. Truly humbled on account of her sin, she saw, as with a glimmering light, God's

loving-kindness in her awakening; and her heart was filled with thankfulness when told that she was to learn more about her God and Saviour at a Protestant school.

"Good night, dear Meta," said Aunt Grace; "it is very late, and you must run quickly home, but the stars will light you on your way." Then placing two Testaments in the little girl's hands, she added, "Those gifts are for you and Ulric; I wish you to read a chapter daily. And remember, little one, that God's Word is a bright lamp, which will show you the way to heaven."

"Thank you, lady; I am sure we shall like to read the books." Then colouring, Meta said, "Some day I must see Rodolph the guide, for he ought to know the truth about the ear-rings; and I wish to say to him that I never confessed to the priest, but I have told it all to Jesus."

"You are right, my child," replies the old lady, while tears stand in her eyes; "and may the Lord bless you and keep you!"

And now we shall bid adieu to the Swiss children, for the sound of their footsteps has died away in the distance, while the moon has lent her pale beauty to the night, and the vale of Lucerne is wrapped in quiet slumber. The English party whom we first knew still linger on the balcony. Long have they talked of Meta Frantz; and as the

youngest of the group wishes Aunt Grace good night, we hear her remark, "Auntie, I shall never forget the Sunday at Lucerne."





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